

Chapter 12

Design of a Blended Learning Environment for the Training of Greek Teachers:

Results of the Survey on Educational Needs

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ABSTRACT

During the period 2010 – 2013 the Ministry of Education and Lifelong Learning of Greece has been designing and implementing a complete project for the transformation of Greek school, so that it can meet the contemporary educational needs and social challenges of the 21st century. The training of all teachers according to the principles and philosophy of the “New school” is a high priority to achieve the goals of the new educational policy. In this context, the “National Program of Teachers’ Training” has been designed to address 150.000 teachers of all levels nationwide. This chapter presents the basic characteristics of the Blended Learning Environment for the Training of teachers and focus, at the same time, on the analysis of the results of the survey on the training needs of the Education personnel, on which the design of the training program was based.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Society has been the top priority of developed countries all over the world, which emphasizes the fundamental role of knowledge as a main element of individual development and social unity (Hargreaves & Giles, 2003). The advent of

Society of Knowledge has imposed significant changes on the way we perceive our personal, social and professional daily routine (Drucker, 1969; Webster, 2002). The ongoing changes in a globalised financial and technological environment lead to the creation of a new social process and highlight the necessity and importance of Lifelong Learning nowadays (Field, 2000; Rubenson & Schuetze, 2000; Jarvis, 2001).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0939-6.ch012

The upsurge of social networking globally, the immense and complex quantity of the available digital information, as well as the fact that knowledge rapidly becomes obsolete are factors which contribute to an unprecedented social, cultural and financial environment, which aggravates the existing digital divide (Cannon, 2007; Chinn & Fairlie, 2007; Anastasiades, 2005).

The design of “New School” aims at addressing the contemporary educational needs and challenges of the 21st century. According to the program manifesto, the new school focuses on the student and through the changes aspires to improve the curriculum and quality of the offered education. It aims at forming a creative and open educational environment of collaborative learning, which, not only allows but also encourages and promotes innovation. “New School” will be all-day, integrating, as well as sustainable and will implement modern instructional approaches in order to address the different needs and skills of students and teachers, as well as the different characteristics of schools, promoting digital communication along with the standard forms of “oral skills” and “literacy”.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will play a significant role in the transition to the new learning environment, as it will contribute to the best management of data and information, the presentation of information through dynamic interactive imaging and communication (Mikropoulos & Bellou, 2006).

In the contemporary school emphasis should be placed upon the pedagogical implementation of ICT to support complex instructional practices (Anastasiades, 2010). We should also highlight that the unwise introduction of technology in class, without pedagogical criteria, will only consolidate the existing structure and aggravate inequality by widening the gap among students in the same class or between schools. The predominance of the technology-centred approach will result in creating educational environments which do not promote critical thinking and lead to an indis-

criminate transfer of social models, which will further affects the current situation (Lionarakis, 2006; Paulsen, 2003; Kanakis, 1990).

The quality of the educational procedure is inextricably connected to the teacher, who must conform school reality and contribute to the promotion of the educational changes and the effectiveness of the instruction. The teacher is asked to create an open learning environment characterised by autonomy, self-action, innovation and creativity, focusing on the explorative and collaborative construction of knowledge as the main elements of the wise transition to the emerging Information Society (Kozma, 2003; Voogt & Pelgrum, 2005; Anderson, 2008; Anastasiades, 2009). In doing so, teachers will exploit ICT under pedagogical criteria.

In this context, the “National Program of Teachers’ Training” has been designed according to the objectives of the project “Education and Lifelong Learning” of the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religion, which aims at upgrading the quality of education. It is directly connected to the philosophy of “New School” and the overall policy of the ongoing teachers’ training, which will enable them to address the social and professional needs by reflecting on the instructional practice itself and aiming at their transformation into creators/co-creators of innovative educational approaches and diverse educational material.

The design of a teachers’ training program should take into consideration the experiences of the trainees, so that it meets the real needs of the teaching personnel (Duncombe & Armour, 2004). Special emphasis should be placed upon the investigation of the training needs before running the program, as it promotes the involvement of teachers in designing the training program and contributes to the most effectual implementation (National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1996).

In this chapter we present the basic characteristics of the Blended Learning Environment for

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